

DATE OF MEETING MARCH 29, 2021

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SUBJECT INTERIM TRANSITION TO VIRTUAL MEETINGS

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To advise Council of the need to transition to hybrid or virtual meetings during the Shaw Auditorium renovation period and present options to facilitate the change.

Recommendation

That Council direct Staff to schedule meetings during the Shaw Auditorium renovation period virtually, with all members of Council and Staff attending through Zoom.

BACKGROUND

In January 2021 a contract for audio and visual technology upgrades for the Shaw Auditorium and Douglas Rispin Room of the Vancouver Island Conference Centre (VICC) was awarded to PJS Systems.

This project is part of an overall technology modernization project for the VICC. A key challenge with the current space is the inflexibility of the furniture and technology to allow for dynamic events and room configurations for various events. The current analog audiovisual connections are complicated and fragile, and there is limited opportunity to reposition the furniture to capitalize on the space. The new audiovisual systems will address these concerns by migrating the audiovisual equipment from complicated analog connections to a network-based solution (AV over IP) with single ruggedized connection points for each major furniture piece as well as mounting all displays and cameras to the existing mobile furniture or securely to the walls and ceiling.

A draperies solution is proposed to allow for the space to be configured as a theatre with wings and a backdrop.

A further challenge with the existing audiovisual technology is that it is not easily reconfigurable to meet challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Physical distancing requirements and mandatory self isolation require different seating layouts and remote participation on an ever-changing basis.

The new audiovisual systems will leverage the City's existing badging (ID cards) technology to allow for participants to sit at any technology enabled seat and tap their ID badge to login to that

position. The system will recognize them and assign the functions and features to that position that are assigned to them such as Request to Speak (RTS) and Voting functions.

Digital Voting has been identified as a desired feature of the new system. Once implemented at a later date, this will allow Council to digitally register in “favour” or “opposed” from any logged in technology enabled seat, or from a secure interface on a PC from a remote location. These voting results would be certified and transmitted digitally to a City database for record keeping. The Request to Speak Queue will be refreshed and updated, and it will also be possible to participate in this system using the same secure interface as the voting system from a remote location. |

DISCUSSION

The proponent and staff aim to ensure the disruption to in-person meetings of Council are as minimal as possible. The proponent has provided their timeline with the understanding that it may be extended due to the worldwide challenge of sourcing goods during the ongoing pandemic. The period where the Shaw Auditorium and Douglas Rispin Room are unavailable is May 3, 2021 to May 25, 2021 inclusive.

In order to facilitate a smooth transition for Mayor and Council, staff are recommending that Regular and Special Council, In Camera Council, Governance and Priorities Committee, Finance and Audit Committee and Public Hearings be held through a virtual meeting method. Staff will facilitate this change by holding meetings over Zoom, a platform Council is already using. Ministerial Order 192 from the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General permits electronic Council member participation. Committee meetings with external membership are unaffected and will continue to meet through a hybrid method with staff and chairs based in the Service and Resource Centre boardroom.

Virtual Meetings:

Virtual meetings require all members of Council and staff to participate over Zoom. Virtual meetings provide the best audio quality and from a technical standpoint are the easiest meeting type to manage and set up. In order to improve audio quality staff will supply Council with headsets containing built in microphones to be used during meetings. The accuracy of closed captioning is expected to increase with the use of headsets. Staff recognize it can be challenging to chair a meeting electronically. Additional support will be provided to members of Council who chair meetings during this time period. Virtual meetings allow for the option to have a limited number of staff and the chair in the same room, using their own tablets, headsets and microphones. Staff anticipate that the CAO, Corporate Officer and Chair would be in the same room using this method. The benefit of being in the same room is that communication between the Chair and corporate officer is more immediate. Food service would continue to be provided for staff and the Chair participating in the same City meeting room during virtual Council meetings.

Hybrid Meetings:

Hybrid meetings require the Chair to attend meetings in person in the boardroom, Service and Resource Centre, while the remainder of Council participates virtually over Zoom. The Corporate Officer would attend in person to provide procedural advice to the Chair. The only

other staff members present would be the CAO, recording secretary and IT support staff. The majority of staff would participate and present virtually. During Regular Council meetings food service will continue to be provided for the members of Council and staff who are required to participate in person. Hybrid meetings provide the lowest audio quality and are the most complex option to manage.

Other Considerations:

In order for virtual meetings to be successful, Council and staff participating in the meeting must have a reliable high-speed internet connection. Participants must also be in a quiet location and be muted when not speaking.

The ability for delegations to participate electronically will not be hindered with the move to virtual or hybrid meetings. Currently members of the public are able to participate in public hearings by telephoning into the meeting. This service will continue to be available if meetings are held over either method. The boardroom in the Service and Resource Centre will be booked regardless of what meeting method is selected as the recording stream will be picked up from the eScribe encoder run through the boardroom computer.

Regular Council Meetings will continue to be live streamed on Shaw TV.

A number of other meeting locations were considered as options for meetings. One of the challenges with holding meetings in a different location, such as the Regional District of Nanaimo Board Chambers, or another room in the Vancouver Island Conference Centre is that an Escribe encoder, specific to the City of Nanaimo, is required to be installed in each meeting room. Encoders are used to stream and convert the audio and video content into a format that can be streamed through the internet on the City's publishing portal. The cost to purchase, license and install an additional encoder in another meeting room is approximately \$18,500. Additional time is also required to test the equipment. Once an encoder is installed it cannot be easily moved to another location. If an encoder is purchased it cannot be returned after the renovation period and would become surplus. Technology such as microphones, speakers and delegation speaking timers would also need to be implemented and tested if an additional room was used.

Prior to reconvening meetings in the Shaw Auditorium, training on the new technology will be provided to Mayor and Council. In order to allow for contingencies, the May 31, 2021 Council meeting will also be held over Zoom.

OPTIONS

1. That Council direct Staff to schedule meetings during the Shaw Auditorium renovation period virtually, with all members of Council and Staff attending through Zoom.
 - The advantages of this option: All members would attend virtually and limit their in-person interactions. This option provides for the best audio quality.
 - The disadvantages of this option: The success of a virtual meeting depends on each participant having a high quality internet connection and muting themselves when

- they are not speaking. Communication between Council can be difficult during a virtual meeting.
- Financial Implications: Catering costs for virtual Council meetings would be reduced from current costs for all of Council and staff. A budget is available for headsets.
2. That Council direct Staff to schedule meetings during the Shaw Auditorium renovation period using a hybrid meeting method, with the Chair attending meetings in person and all other members of Council attending virtually.
- The advantages of this option: The Corporate Officer would be in the same room as the Chair to assist with meeting governance.
 - The disadvantages of this option: The hybrid meeting type is the most technical to manage. The Chair would be required to attend the meeting in person, increasing in person interactions.
 - Financial Implications: Food service would be provided for the Chair and staff required to meet in person for Council meetings. A budget is available for headsets.
3. That Council direct Staff to schedule meetings during the Shaw Auditorium renovation period as in person meetings in the boardroom, Service and Resource Centre.
- The advantages of this option: Council would continue to meet in person.
 - The disadvantages of this option: There is a limited number of people permitted in the boardroom, Service and Resource Centre. Due to the limited capacity and requirements for physical distancing, if room capacity is reached, in order to comply with public health orders those present in the boardroom will be required to wear masks. There are no plexiglas dividers between seats. Due to limited capacity, staff would participate via Zoom. This option does not adhere to the public health order which recommends that virtual meetings be held as much as possible.
 - Financial Implications: Catering costs would increase with all of Council attending meetings in person as individual meals would need to be provided for Council meetings.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The Shaw Auditorium and Douglas Rispin Room of the Vancouver Island Conference Centre will undergo audio and visual upgrades from May 3 – 25, 2021 and will be unavailable.
- During the renovation period it is recommended that meetings be held over Zoom via virtual method.
- Meetings will continue to be livestreamed, recorded and available on the City's website.

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